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New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda items 33 and 35 *(continued)*

The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Only a few days ago the international community, and especially the peoples of the Middle East, appealed once again to the United Nations Security Council to shoulder its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and take appropriate measures so that Israel would reverse its decision to build new settlements in the district of Jabal Abu Ghneim, south of Jerusalem. It was hoped that the Security Council would categorically reaffirm that the acquisition of land by force is illegal and that the building of new settlements is inadmissible, and that it would ask the Israeli Government to refrain from any act of provocation that could imperil the peace process and the security of the region.

Contrary to the will of the international community, the Security Council once again decided on total impunity for the actions of the occupying Power. The United States of America, exercising the anachronistic and undemocratic right of veto, revealed once again the increasing lack of credibility, the ineffectiveness and the double standards of the organ to which the founders of the United Nations assigned the principal responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The United States Government decided to veto the draft resolution, thus reaffirming its unconditional support for the aggressive and hostile policy of the Israeli Government. This came in open contradiction of the United States of America's usual rhetorical posturing as a guardian of international peace and security, which it often uses as a pretext for interfering in the internal affairs of States or for undermining their sovereignty.

The United States has tried to persuade world public opinion and the peoples of the Middle East that the balance and credibility of the peace process in the region would be affected by the Security Council's adoption of a draft resolution of that type, or of any type, in order to justify its veto of a draft resolution that merely called upon Israel to refrain from any action or measure that altered the facts on the ground, not to prejudge the final status negotiations and to avoid actions that would adversely affect the peace process.

This is obviously a matter of illegitimate interests, not of principles.

Those who, over the space of less than two years, have vetoed two draft resolutions in the Security Council on the situation in the occupied Arab territories cannot hide the fact that the decision taken by Israel on 26 February 1997 constitutes a flagrant violation of the basic principles of the Middle East peace process, of international law and of the most basic norms of international humanitarian law, including those enshrined in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and in The Hague Rules of 1907.

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Israel's aggressive policy towards the occupied Arab territories also constitutes a violation of the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly on the situation in the occupied Arab territories and the question of Palestine. The applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to all Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, has been upheld in 24 Security Council resolutions. The fact that the Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories constitute a violation has been referred to in a number of Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 446 (1979), 452 (1979) and 465 (1980). It has been clearly recognized in relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 252 (1968), 271 (1969), 298 (1971), 478 (1980) and 672 (1990), that any action or measure taken by Israel to alter the legal status or demographic composition of the city of Jerusalem is legally null and void.

All these truths cannot be ignored. In truth, this is a matter of legitimate principles, not of interests.

Cuba adds its voice to the international community's condemnation of this new Israeli aggression against the people of Palestine and against occupied Jerusalem. Cuba supports the just position of the Arab States in the face of the Israeli actions in violation of the Madrid and Hebron agreements, actions that imperil the future of the peace process in the Middle East.

Cuba hopes that the General Assembly, the only universal body of this Organization and its highest forum, with the transparency and responsibility required for the maintenance of international peace and security and the peace process in the Middle East, will take a firm stance and give the appropriate response that the Security Council was unable to give.

Cuba hopes that the General Assembly will assert the will of the international community against the undemocratic right of veto and its arbitrary use.

Mr. Kim Chang Guk (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): The world is following with deep concern the developments in the Middle East, where the peace process, which had offered hope for the resolution of the Palestinian question and for peace in the region, has again been faced with difficulties.

Recently the Israeli Government approved the building of a new Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, just before the final stage of the peace talks between Palestine and Israel to define the status of Jerusalem.

This decision reveals Israel's ulterior intention to occupy East Jerusalem indefinitely, as it is aimed at altering the status of Jerusalem. The Israeli Government's decision shows why peace in the Middle East could not be achieved up to now in spite of the just struggle of the Arab nations and the sincere support of the peace-loving peoples of the world for scores of years.

The Israeli Government's settlement policy is illegal in the light of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. It is one of the main obstacles to the Middle East peace process.

As we all know very well, the history of mankind teaches that there is no peace in occupied territories. However, the Prime Minister of Israel said that the building of the Jewish settlement is not aimed at killing the peace process but at reviving it. This statement of the Israeli Prime Minister greatly disappoints the peoples of the world who earnestly wish for peace and stability in the region.

The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea expresses deep concern over the recent developments in the Middle East and takes this opportunity to reiterate that peace in the Middle East should be achieved through dialogue and negotiations rather than conflict.

It is clear to everybody that the purpose of the Israeli Government's decision is to occupy East Jerusalem indefinitely. This decision is another challenge that lays a new obstacle for the Middle East peace process.

Israel should immediately stop unjustifiable acts which delay and endanger the Middle East peace process. It should pay due attention to the just demands of the Arab countries.

The Middle East issue should be solved in a fair and comprehensive manner on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Their right to establish an independent State should be restored, and Israel should withdraw from all the occupied Arab lands.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will follow with keen interest the developments in Middle East, and in the future it will also extend support to and act in solidarity with the Arab nations in their just cause, standing firmly at their side.

Mr. Butler (Australia): In the Security Council on 27 September 1996, Australia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Alexander Downer, said

> "Peace must be pursued with vigour and must be accompanied by serious attempts to eliminate fundamental sources of injustice and to spread the message of tolerance." *(S/PV.3698 (Resumption 1), p. 15)*

He urged the parties to the dispute to honour the obligations and commitments they had made and to commit themselves to the search for a peaceful resolution of their differences.

Australia is encouraged that the terrible violence which generated the debate at that time has diminished, and in January we joined the rest of the international community in welcoming the Hebron agreement as an important step forward on the path to peace.

Australia is now deeply concerned that the situation in the region again has the potential to lead to a further outbreak of violence and to undermine the trust and confidence necessary for successful continuation of the peace talks.

Australia is following closely the situation in the Middle East. Australia's Deputy Prime Minister, The Honourable Tim Fischer, M.P., is currently in the region having a range of discussions at the highest levels on recent developments and on the prospects for the peace process.

Australia is concerned about Israel's decision to build on Har Homa/Jabal Abu Ghneim. The decision is inconsistent with the body of Security Council resolutions on the Middle East. It is unhelpful. It complicates the process of achieving a peaceful settlement. Both sides should avoid actions which would jeopardize that.

Australia's support for the Madrid process has been strong and consistent because we consider that it offers the best prospect for the achievement of a just and secure peace in the Middle East. Australia supports a settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace, the Oslo Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993 and the Madrid process.

Australia's support for Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized borders has also been strong and consistent. We also support the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, and we acknowledge that the question of Palestinian self-determination and the ultimate shape of the Palestinian entity, including the possibility of an independent State, is subject to the final status negotiations between the parties.

In order to ensure that those negotiations proceed as rapidly and as smoothly as possible, neither party should take action which presumes their outcome. Australia therefore calls on the Government of Israel to consider again its decision to build on Har Homa/Jabal Abu Ghneim.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): Just a few days ago the Russian delegation had a chance to set forth in the Security Council its views on the situation that has been created by the Israeli Government's decision to proceed with construction of a new neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. Discussions of this matter, in which an unprecedentedly large number of delegations have wished to participate, have shown virtually unanimous opposition on the part of the international community to this step taken by Israel, on the grounds that it contradicts the spirit and the letter of the Middle East peace process launched in Madrid.

From the General Assembly rostrum today we would like to reiterate our disagreement with the inconsiderate and untimely action taken by Israel. That unilateral step violates the norms of international law and runs counter to the Palestinian-Israeli agreements that have been reached, since it is intended to change the demographic composition of East Jerusalem in favour of the Israeli population and thereby consolidate the policy of fait accompli in the Holy City. In the context of such actions, we disagree in principle with arguments that these problems should be addressed on a bilateral Israeli-Palestinian basis. Such arguments could be warranted if Israel followed this principle itself. Its unilateral actions, however, are taken outside the framework of bilateral talks with the Palestinians. In fact, these actions predetermine any negotiated solutions to these issues at the final status talks, the agenda for which includes the status of Jerusalem and the fate of settlements. The Israeli actions are at variance with the course set for the peace process by the Madrid Conference, since they effectively rule out a negotiated search for compromise on the issue of Jerusalem.

Israel's decision has been condemned by the Palestinians, by the Arab and Islamic worlds, and by the international community as a whole. Regrettably, this

decision was adopted against the backdrop of the recently reached agreement on Hebron, which had cleared a road to progress on the Palestinian-Israeli track.

A co-sponsor of the peace process, Russia is willing to make every effort to avoid a reversal in the Middle East settlement process and to contribute to the resumption of talks in a constructive spirit. According to the letter of the Madrid formula, these talks must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as on the Palestinian-Israeli agreements already reached. Therefore, the principles set down in these, including the inadmissibility of the acquisition of foreign territory by force, are applicable not only to the current situation but also to a further solution of the East Jerusalem problem. In that connection, the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and statehood — something we would like to stress particularly — can be realized only on a basis of mutual acceptability and within the framework of the current peace process.

The topic of Israeli settlements was discussed in Moscow during a recent visit by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. We call upon the Israeli Government to reconsider its decisions in order to ensure progress in the peace process in the interests of both Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Both parties should avoid old habits of confrontation in Palestinian-Israeli relations.

Breaking the deadlock in the problem of new Israeli neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem would contribute to the early launching and the constructive holding, in compliance with an agreed time-frame, of substantive talks on the issues of the second stage of the Palestinian-Israeli settlement, and would also stimulate an intensification of work on all the negotiating tracks.

The Russian delegation regrets to note that, owing to the position of one of the members of the Security Council, the Council failed to adopt a draft resolution on the issue of East Jerusalem which, in our view, reflected in an objective manner the views of virtually every participant in the open formal discussion in the Council.

We viewed with understanding a request by the Group of Arab States to continue the discussion of this issue in the General Assembly. We hope that the Assembly's decision will encourage a settlement of the situation in East Jerusalem and a continuation of the peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan): We are meeting today at a particularly critical juncture in the history of Middle East. It is with a sense of utmost concern that the Government of Pakistan views the recent decision by Israel to build a new settlement consisting of 6,500 housing units in the Jabal Abu Ghneim area of East Jerusalem. Israel has also continued to keep open the tunnel extending under the Western Wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque — Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We have also been equally disturbed to learn that Israel has continued to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank by declaring it off limits to Palestinians and withdrawing residence permits for the city's original Arab inhabitants. Pakistan strongly condemns all these actions, which constitute a blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements and accords concluded between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The complete details of these measures as well as their alarming consequences for the Palestinian people and their economy have already been described by Ambassador Nasser Al-Kidwa, the Permanent Observer of Palestine. These measures are also particularly disturbing as they seriously undermine the peace process, which had been arrived at through bold and courageous initiatives taken earlier.

The special significance of the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the international community in general and the Islamic *ummah* in particular requires no elaboration. Israeli measures, which are aimed at altering the legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem, are illegal and invalid since they are contrary to the principles enshrined in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), notably the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. Moreover, these measures prejudge the final status negotiations and could lead to the reversal of the peace process.

Provocative Israeli actions have also once again shattered the hope that the peace process would lead to the early exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination through the establishment of an independent homeland. This required the complete withdrawal by the Israeli authorities from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Pakistan's support for the just struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people is well known. We have consistently stated that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978)

continue to provide a viable and just framework for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

It is incumbent upon the international community at this critical juncture to salvage the Middle East region from the atmosphere of conflict and war. It must encourage the forces of moderation, dialogue and compromise. It is obvious that for the Middle East to be allowed to plunge into a new vicious cycle of violence and chaos would be a serious threat to international peace and security. We fully share the expectation of the international community that there should be no attempt to derail the implementation of the agreements and accords. The provisions of these agreements and accords must be sincerely complied with both in letter and in spirit. We hope that the Israeli leadership will concede to the realities on ground and resolve all pending issues with the Palestinian National Authority, including the immediate reversal of their alarming actions. We strongly urge the demonstration of the requisite flexibility and accommodation as well as a sincere commitment to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that will ensure security and stability for all in the Middle East.

The draft resolution to come before the Assembly will embody the principles which constitute the minimum that must be accomplished by the Israeli authorities. Pakistan will be among the sponsors of the draft resolution and earnestly hopes that all Member States will support its adoption without a vote.

Mr. Biegman (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following associated countries have aligned themselves with this statement: Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Iceland and Liechtenstein have also aligned themselves with it.

The European Union believes that there is no alternative to the peace process, to which we remain deeply committed.

In the interest of the peace process, the European Union calls upon all parties to observe the utmost restraint regarding issues that could prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations. We therefore greatly regret actions taken by the Government of Israel such as the annexation of land, the demolition of houses, new settlement construction and the expansion of settlements. The European Union expresses its hope that both parties proceed to serious and substantial talks on the permanent status questions, which are due to begin on 17 March.

The European Union recalls that East Jerusalem is subject to the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), notably the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and is therefore not under Israeli sovereignty. The European Union considers that the fourth Geneva Convention is fully applicable to East Jerusalem, as it is to other territories under occupation.

Accordingly, as we stated in the debate in the Security Council on 6 March, the European Union deeply deplores the decision of the Israeli Government to approve construction plans for Jabal Abu Ghneim/Har Homa on the West Bank in the Jerusalem area. This poses a threat to the positive developments that have taken place, marked by the agreement reached on the redeployment of Israeli troops from Hebron. The European Union has repeatedly stated that settlements in the occupied territories contravene international law and pose a major obstacle to peace. That is why the members of the European Union have decided to add their names to the list of sponsors of the draft resolution submitted at this meeting. We call on both parties to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid any possible confrontation.

The European Union has taken note of the decision of the Israeli Cabinet on 6 March concerning the first phase of the further redeployments We reaffirm that the redeployment must be credible in terms of territory handed over to the Palestinian Authority. To do otherwise might have serious implications for the peace process.

The European Union remains firmly of the view that the peace process is the only path to security and peace for the Palestinians as well as for Israel and the neighbouring States. We consider it essential at this juncture to reclaim the spirit of the Madrid and Oslo agreements, and we urge all parties to implement these agreements fully. There can be no alternative to a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Palestinian question and to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. Any such settlement must have as its basis Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and fall within the framework of international law.

We reiterate in this regard the key principles of self-determination for the Palestinians, with all that that implies, and of land for peace. The European Union

confirms its attachment to such a solution. It stands ready to participate and assist in every way possible in order to achieve this long-awaited objective.

Ms. Tan (Singapore): The Israeli Government's decision to proceed with the construction of an Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem could have the effect of undermining the spirit of trust and cooperation that is vital to the success of the Middle East peace process. At a time when the peace process has gathered new momentum with the signing of the Hebron Agreement on 17 January 1997 and all concerned parties are working tirelessly to ensure its successful implementation, this decision threatens to unravel the hard work achieved thus far in the peace process.

All Governments have the right to adopt policies that address the housing needs of their populations. Indeed, this is one of the fundamental tasks of any self-respecting government. Israel is entitled to its housing plans to provide for the housing needs of both Jews and Arabs in the country. However, the selection of East Jerusalem as the venue of the housing project is controversial because unilateral steps that can alter the current status of Jerusalem will only complicate the already difficult negotiations. The final status of Jerusalem, a city of sacred importance not only to the Jews but also to the Muslims, is still subject to the outcome of negotiations between the two parties. Singapore therefore urges the Israeli Government to reconsider the housing project in East Jerusalem so that the peace process can continue unimpeded.

Singapore reaffirms its commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict as a significant contribution to strengthening international peace and security, as set out in General Assembly resolution 51/26 of 4 December 1996 on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. We will continue to do our part in supporting efforts to bring about the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine so as to realize the just aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) (*interpretation from French*): I am speaking on behalf of the Al-Quds/Jerusalem Committee, which my country chairs.

Today's meeting of the General Assembly on the Israeli decision to establish a new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim, south-east of the Holy City of Al-Quds, reflects the international community's deep concern at the fact that these measures could lead to the collapse of the peace process.

The philosophy underlying the Oslo accords presupposes that the parties comply with the agreements strictly entered into and scrupulously implement them. These accords, which undeniably constitute one of the basic elements of the peace process, established two fundamental principles: first, that Jerusalem would be discussed at the end of the process; and secondly, that in the meantime no step would be taken that might prejudge the results of these negotiations.

All of this had been proceeding smoothly until the Israeli Government began to show signs of bad faith, which Arab public opinion interpreted as a desire to call into question the issue of peace in the Middle East.

The international community also took a negative view. Throughout the world, from east to west and north to south, people everywhere blamed Israel, calling it to reason and to comply with the agreements — agreements that, as everyone knows, were born of a painful process, leaving no room for mistakes or uncertainties.

It was decided in these agreements to leave the question of Jerusalem until the end, because it concerns not only Palestinians and Israelis but also Muslims and Jews; and where religion is concerned, everyone has equal rights.

The decision was made not to deal with Jerusalem until the end of the negotiations because the issue is a very sensitive and delicate one. All of these precautions were taken at a time when the process was characterized by optimism — when in spite of the understandable pressures and setbacks in the process, good faith was the order of the day and everyone understood the paramount importance of its application.

What has happened now? The most critical and the most optimistic observers alike have agreed to denounce the actions of the Government of Israel, which has deliberately decided to leave the road to peace in order to follow other routes that will lead us away from the objectives of peace to which all have agreed.

We decidedly deplore this turn of events because our country has unambiguously and forthrightly made a commitment to peace, just as it made a commitment to participating with Israel in the development of the Middle East on the basis of frank and faithful cooperation between all the parties.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to recall the credit that Israel reaped in the months following the signing of the peace agreements. That country renewed relations with many countries and undeniably gained more trust than it had ever enjoyed before. All of this is now going up in smoke, and even peace with Syria and Lebanon has become illusory.

What has happened in recent months, and particularly since the decision taken by the Government of Israel to establish a new settlement in south-eastern Jerusalem, has done enormous harm to this peace, to the prospects for development, to Israel and to the confidence that the entire world had begun to place in a country that had finally begun to build momentum by recognizing the existence of the Palestinian people and its right to self-determination and to the creation of a State on its own territory.

The Israeli decision to establish a new settlement in the Holy City of Al-Quds contravenes Security Council resolutions and international law, which ban the alteration of the legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem. It is a challenge that the international community must face in one way or another.

Those who believed in the peace of September 1993 are now wondering what could have happened to allow responsible Governments to jeopardize this work that was carried out through so many efforts and so much sacrifice.

The international community is duty-bound to prevent any measure that might arouse such feelings, starting with the decision to establish these new settlements. The mobilization of the international community is a way to show solidarity with the Palestinian people, and Israel should not be allowed to forget its historical responsibilities to bring the process to a conclusion without evasions or delay.

Many countries, such as my own, continue to hope, after all this, that Israel will re-embark upon the course of peace, the only one that can lead to peace of mind for its people and the peoples of the entire region. May the message of today's gathering be heard loud and clear as the world's appeal to Israel to realize that no more time must be wasted.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam): First of all, on behalf of the delegation of Viet Nam, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking you, Mr. President, for resuming the fifty-first session of the General Assembly to consider agenda items 33 and 35.

The Government of Viet Nam has been following closely the evolution of the peace process in the Middle East, particularly the question of Palestine. We have wholeheartedly supported the Middle East Peace process and have rejoiced at its hard-won achievements. We have welcomed the most significant progress that has been recorded during the last few years, including the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in September 1995, the successful holding on 20 January 1996 of the First Palestinian general elections for the Legislative Council and the presidency of the Palestinian National Authority. Particularly, we welcome the recent signing on 17 January 1997 of the Hebron protocol, which has led to the redeployment of Israeli forces from most parts of Hebron as a positive step towards the full realization of the long-awaited comprehensive and just settlement in the region.

While the peace process was slowly easing its way forward, negative incidents occurred and created a major obstacle to peace in the region. We would like to express our deep concern over the 26 February decision to begin construction of new housing in Jabal Abu Ghneim/Har Homa in the southern part of East Jerusalem and other recent measures that encourage and facilitate new settlement activities.

We fully support the Palestinians' position concerning Jerusalem. We also reaffirm the legal status of Jerusalem and, most notably, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and reiterate that there will be no peace in the region without the attainment of Palestinian and Arab rights in that Holy City.

Regarding the settlement issue, we believe that such settlements are not only illegal but also a violation of international law, United Nations Security Council resolutions and the agreements already reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We strongly reiterate that unilateral steps which are not in conformity with the agreements already signed hinder the peace process and must be immediately stopped. In this regard, we share the hope of the international community that all parties concerned will honour their commitments, show good faith and refrain from taking any further measure that could undermine the peace process.

In encouraging all parties concerned to continue their efforts aimed at reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region, we urge them to continue their

negotiations within the Middle East peace process on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the timely implementation of the agreements already reached.

As it has already stated on various occasions, my delegation believes that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement which will ensure the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and statehood.

Mr. Ayewah (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation associates itself with the sentiments expressed by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the African Group in respect of the three great leaders who recently passed on.

Mr. Martinez Blanco (Honduras), Vice-President, took the Chair.

My delegation has continued to follow with keen interest developments in the Middle East, particularly in relation to the question of the occupied territories and the recent decision of the Israeli Government to undertake the construction of new housing units for Jewish settlers in the Jabal Abu Ghneim/Har Homa area of East Jerusalem. Of course, we note that this is only the latest in a series of measures taken and policies adopted by the Israeli Government concerning the occupied territories, all of which are aimed at presenting the Palestinians with a fait accompli. Not only are these policies unhelpful to the peace process, but they contravene relevant Security Council resolutions and Israeli obligations under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The only bright spot in the peace process during the last 12 months was the agreement concerning Israeli troop withdrawals from Hebron. We had hoped that it would mark a welcome turning point for the peace process after the deadly blows that were inflicted upon it throughout 1996. While we have never been under any illusion that the peace process was going to be hitch-free, we were until recently genuinely encouraged by the positive developments that had taken place since Madrid and had let ourselves begin to hope that peace and stability in the region were finally within reach.

My delegation very much understands the Israeli attachment to the city of Jerusalem. By the same token, we believe that the Government and people of Israel should recognize that the Palestinians and others feel equally strongly about the city. In fact, that was what informed the wise decision taken in Oslo to defer discussions on the sensitive subject until the last stage of the negotiations. And precisely to ensure that these negotiations would take place in good faith and on the basis of the spirit of give and take, it was also decided in Oslo that the parties should refrain from taking any actions which sought to change the status quo. The recent step taken by Israel can only prejudice the outcome of those negotiations.

We were struck by the consensus and almost total unanimity that characterized the debate in the Security Council on this subject last week. A majority of delegations condemned the Israeli decision and all except Israel were agreed that it would negatively impact on the peace process. It was therefore a matter of regret for my Government that the Security Council was prevented from exercising its Charter responsibilities. This not only damages the credibility of the Council, but makes the search for peace more difficult. That is why my delegation is contributing to the debate we are having today in the General Assembly and supports the sentiments that have been expressed during this debate.

On the basis of the foregoing, we hope that the Israeli Government will reconsider its position and decide against going ahead with the construction. It is the only way to give new impetus to the peace process and ultimately to ensure long-term peace and security for the region.

Mr. Shah (India): It is ironic yet significant that we are once again meeting — for all practical purposes in an emergency session of the General Assembly — to act on an issue pertaining to the Middle East after the Security Council has been unable to act in the matter. We faced a similar situation last year in April on the question of Lebanon and the General Assembly had to act. Once again, this demonstrates the importance of speedy action on strengthening the General Assembly and democratizing the Security Council.

The international community has wholeheartedly supported the peace process in the Middle East. We were heartened by the recent agreement on Hebron and had hoped that the peace process was once again firmly back on track. However, the recent Israeli Government approval for construction of the settlements at Jabal Abu Ghneim, to the south of East Jerusalem, has caused us deep concern. India has consistently maintained, and continues to do so, that unilateral steps which are not in conformity with past agreements and understandings would hinder the Middle East peace process and vitiate

the atmosphere for building the mutual confidence essential for the peace negotiations to progress.

India remains convinced of the need for purposeful negotiations on all issues in the final status negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We have repeatedly urged all parties concerned to intensify their efforts towards finding a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region and we continue to do so. This would enable the achievement of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and of all States within internationally recognized boundaries.

India's bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people are deep and abiding. India continues to believe that the question of Palestine remains at the core of the Arab-Israeli problem. In this context, India has extended unqualified support to the Middle East peace process on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): The request to hold this urgent session of the General Assembly on the situation in the Middle East affirms, among other things, the serious concern of the international community about that situation.

The Namibian people, having travelled the road of occupation, cannot but associate themselves with the fate of the Palestinian people and have always expressed their solidarity with their just cause.

The Palestinian peace accord and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority had given hope for lasting peace in the Middle East. We can still remember the jubilance which met the deployment of the Palestinian Police Force in the West Bank. Furthermore, the signing of the Hebron protocol was a welcome building-block in the early achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We had begun to visualize, among other things, a peaceful and secure childhood for the Palestinian children. However, recent developments have dampened our hopes.

In October last year, from this very rostrum, Namibia, speaking on the Middle East situation, reiterated that the first step towards consolidating the Middle East peace process is the immediate cessation of the creation new settlements and the termination of the reconstruction work in the old city of Jerusalem. These views were as valid then as they are now.

The decision by the Israeli Government to build a new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem cannot serve to extend the progress achieved so far. The intention of the Israeli authorities to implement measures to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory will further complicate the peace process. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to send a clear and unified message to the Israeli Government to, *inter alia*, cease establishing new settlements. The adoption of a draft resolution by the General Assembly towards that end is therefore warranted.

It is the view of the Government of the Republic of Namibia that the supporters of the peace process should contribute towards the restoration of partnership for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in the best interest of all parties in the Middle East. In particular, supporters should promote the exercise of self-determination by the Palestinians and the establishment of an independent state of their own. Just as the best interests of both parties should be taken into account, so both parties should honour in full this commitment to the realization of peace.

The international community cannot abandon the Palestinian people. So much blood has been shed for peace in the Middle East; What is needed is not further bloodshed, but rather the continuation of negotiations in the interest of peace and the implementation of the agreements reached. This Assembly has a role to play in the achievement of that end. We owe it to those who have sacrificed their lives for peace in the Middle East, to future generations and to the world at large.

The seeds of peace can be watered only by policies that enhance the spirit and logic of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements of 1993. The peace process cannot coexist with the extension of occupation, for the two are totally incompatible.

Historical experiences in southern Africa, among other places, have shown that it is possible for yesterday's antagonists to coexist peacefully today. That can be achieved only if both parties — not one — fully work towards that goal.

Together we have a responsibility to ensure that real peace in the Middle East is achieved and an independent Palestinian State is established.

Mr. Pérez-Otermin (Uruguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation is participating in this meeting of the General Assembly in the hope of helping to restore the language of conciliation of the Middle East peace process begun at the Madrid Conference in 1991.

We believe it is imperative that the parties not stray from that process, and we are concerned by destabilizing events that do not contribute to reaffirming efforts for peace and strengthening both sides' confidence in those efforts.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alvaro Ramos, said earlier in the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, the international community must continue to encourage direct dialogue between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the Arab countries in order to support mutual recognition and faithfulness to the ultimate objective of a firm and lasting peace in the Middle East. Accordingly, we appeal unconditionally to the parties to refrain from taking any decisions that might affect the confidence that should be guiding all parties.

This is why we believe it is inappropriate for a decision to be taken to build new settlements in East Jerusalem, because this imperils the climate of understanding necessary for peace.

Uruguay urges the parties to resume dialogue and fulfil their existing commitments under legal agreements approved and guaranteed by the international community in order to resolve their differences along the way to firm and lasting peace in the region.

Because so many lives have been sacrificed to the cause of a just and lasting solution reached by peaceful means, we must act more forcefully, though also more cautiously. We will do all we can to make sure that events do not lead to acts of violence, which, unfortunately, in the past have hampered efforts to achieve harmonious coexistence in the region.

Mr. Jonah (Sierra Leone): Sierra Leone feels obliged to intervene in this discussion to underscore its concern about recent developments and also to express its regret that once again the use of the veto in the Security Council has frustrated the will of the international community. In this connection, I wish to state that my country believes that the United Nations has a responsibility in the context of the resolution of the Middle East crisis. I understand those who believe that the parties must continue to deal with each other; we support direct negotiation. But Israeli-Arab relations affect the wider international community. Therefore, the United Nations must be involved.

It is particularly strange to hear what the representative of Israel has said. Without the involvement of the United Nations, Israel would not have existed. So I think this series of meetings in the General Assembly is of the utmost importance.

We all know full well what a sensitive issue Jerusalem is in the Middle East. Therefore, when one side takes unilateral decisions which may affect the outcome of the final status, I think we all must be concerned.

And this is what my Government believes: We cannot accept the action of Israel in this connection, because it destroys the great hope we all felt just a few months ago, that at long last the Middle East was moving towards a lasting solution. We therefore support the attempts now being made to prepare a draft resolution for the General Assembly which would send the message to the Government of Israel that, while we believe that Israel must live within secure borders and in peace with its neighbours, Israel cannot continue to take actions that will make it difficult for us to achieve peace in the Middle East.

I believe also that those Arab States that have stretched out their hands to Israel should not be discouraged by this kind of unilateral action. On this occasion, we want to reaffirm our support for the peace process in Israel and in Arab States; we want to support the concept of direct negotiations; but we will always oppose attempts by one side to preempt the final solution to this crisis.

Mr. Guillén (Peru) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Peru enthusiastically sponsored the draft resolution on the Middle East peace process submitted to the General Assembly following the important Oslo accords. We therefore do not consider that either the General Assembly or the United Nations itself is interfering at a time when there is a grave lack of compliance with that process.

We have been following the important process, which must address, *inter alia*, one of the most difficult of problems: the policy of establishing settlements in territories occupied by Israel, which following the 1967 conflict were to be returned in exchange for peace and recognized boundaries. We fear a breakdown of the wise agreement to halt the building of new settlements, which

basically constitutes a whole new expansion policy. We had hoped for the full implementation of the 17 January protocol on Hebron.

We consider that the construction in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem — the capital whose status is one of the most sensitive questions and hence one of the matters to be considered at the end of the negotiating process — is a fresh challenge to the peace process itself, and a violation of international agreements and the norms of international law.

Forty-nine representatives spoke in the Security Council, a vast majority of them calling for a halt to this act, which is imperiling the peace process, a process that is already impeded by a change of policy in Israel. Fourteen votes were cast in favour of the draft resolution submitted by a group of Western countries; this constitutes an appeal that must be heeded.

As we make our statements in this most representative of international forums — statements that are directed towards safeguarding security — and at a time when the Palestinian Authority has extended invitations to an important meeting in Gaza on Saturday, it is, in our view, very important that peace be strictly respected so as not to give any excuse for pursuing a policy of force.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): Earlier in this session of the General Assembly, my President, His Excellency Benjamin William Mkapa, expressed our earnest hope for the implementation of the peace accords on the situation in the Middle East. It was in this light, and with a sense of immense promise, that the United Republic of Tanzania welcomed the agreement signed between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel on 17 January 1997, on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Hebron.

It is therefore with a sense of deep concern and regret that this meeting of the General Assembly has been convened, not to renew its confidence in the ongoing peace process in the Middle East but to address what for the time being must be seen as a serious threat to the process.

Only last September the Security Council met to discuss the situation in the occupied Arab territories. As a result, the Council adopted its resolution 1073 (1996), in which it called for the immediate cessation by Israel of all acts which had resulted in the aggravation of the situation in the areas and which potentially had negative implications for the Middle East peace process. The United Republic of Tanzania followed developments in the region with an optimism which, we believed, had been rewarded by the Hebron agreement.

It is in this context and with this background that the recent decision by the Government of Israel to build new housing units in East Jerusalem raises concerns of a fundamental nature. While the Hebron agreement expanded our hopes in the momentum for peace and stability in the region, the new decision confronts us with our worst fears, as it injects new tensions on the ground and seeks to undermine the trust which must exist between the parties if any meaningful process is to be sustained. In our view, the decision by the Government of Israel must be condemned for what it is: Israel's reneging on its commitment to the peace process in the Middle East.

The status of East Jerusalem remains subject to the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Until the parties come to an agreement, the context of Security Council resolution 1073 (1996) must also be seen as invalidating any attempt to acquire territory by force or by any other subtle means. One cannot therefore dismiss the Israeli decision as inconsequential. It can potentially, and profoundly, alter the dynamics of the peace process in the region. It is our view that this development is not to the advantage of the international community — much less to that of the parties themselves.

Since the PLO and the Government of Israel have agreed to negotiate the status of the occupied territories, it is a reflection of bad faith if unilateral actions are allowed to subvert that understanding. This would also constitute an irreparable erosion of the necessary confidence the parties must have for each other to sustain the negotiations. The United Republic of Tanzania therefore joins with those who have called on the Government of Israel to reconsider its decision and remedy the situation.

The Government of Israel has taken the position that the General Assembly and this Organization itself are not the appropriate forums to deal with issues concerning Israel and Palestine. We accept that disputes are best settled between the parties concerned. We believe, however, that this Organization and its Member States have made a considerable contribution to the peace process — and maybe that is an understatement. This is a world forum. It cannot be discounted. Events in the

Middle East have a tremendous bearing on the rest of the world.

It is regrettable that last Friday the Security Council was not able to adopt a resolution characterizing the intended new settlements in East Jerusalem as illegal and a major obstacle to the peace process. However, we take consolation in the fact that the entire Security Council, without exception, agrees that the decision of the Government of Israel is not only unhelpful to the peace process but undermines it. The Assembly, therefore, cannot be seen to condone any actions which might endanger the peace process in the Middle East.

The United Republic of Tanzania continues to express its earnest hope that the Government of Israel will appreciate that it is in the interest of all that it should abandon the decision recently made on the construction of the settlement in East Jerusalem and, instead, expend its energy and resources towards the peace process in which all of us have an interest.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I now call on the Observer of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Ansay (Organization of the Islamic Conference): Mr. President, on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Laraki, the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), I thank you for calling on me to address the General Assembly on agenda items 33, "The situation in the Middle East", and 35, "Question of Palestine". In view of the time factor and the fact that the delegations of several member States of the OIC have already spoken on these two agenda items, our intervention today will be brief.

At the outset, let me say, as I said in my statement last week in the Security Council, that I wish I had taken the floor under better, instead of what have become bitter, circumstances. For we in the OIC had joined forces with the international community in supporting the peace process in the Middle East in full measure, despite some of the disadvantageous elements that the relevant agreements contained affecting Palestinian interests. We were even entertaining hopes about the future of peace in the area because of those few achievements that already had emerged during the early stages of the implementation of the Oslo accords. We were gratified last January by the agreement on the redeployment of Israeli troops from Al-Khalil, and we were prepared to continue to lend our full support to the attainment of the agreed goals and objectives of the peace agreements.

Regrettably, our hopes together with those of well-wishers in the international community, have been shattered by the unfortunate turn of events in Palestine, the responsibility for which must lie with Israel and Israel alone. The turmoil has been brought about by a series of violations of various elements of the peace agreements by Israel, and the Israeli decision on 26 February 1997 to build a new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. That decision constitutes the latest attempt by Israel to pre-empt the outcome of the negotiations on the final status by changing the legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem — a city that is of central importance to the Arab and Muslim worlds, as it is the first kiblah and the third holiest city of Islam; to the three major religions; and to the international community at large. The Israeli decision not only violates the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the Declaration of Principles and the subsequent agreements, but threatens to undermine the progress that has been achieved in the Middle East peace process.

In this regard, I would remind delegations that the Islamic Group at the United Nations, at the Council's meeting held on 5 March 1997, had called on the international community, including the Security Council, to take urgent steps to ensure that the Government of Israel reverses its decision and renounces any settlement activity in all the occupied Arab territories, in particular East Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the Council failed to take a position on the issue, necessitating the convening of this meeting of the General Assembly.

In the spirit of our solidarity with the peace process in the Middle East, we reiterate our condemnation of this latest decision by the Israeli Government concerning East Jerusalem, just as we condemned the opening of the tunnel under the western wall of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque.

I should like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the position of the OIC that a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region cannot be achieved without the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which, *inter alia*, emphasize that Jerusalem is part and parcel of the territories occupied since 1967.

In this context we in the OIC have requested the Security Council to implement all of its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 465, 476 and 478 (1980), and 1073 (1996), all of which concern Jerusalem; to take all necessary measures to prevent Israel from altering the geographical and demographic status of Jerusalem; and to prevent it from taking any action that in any way affects the status of Jerusalem, the final status of which is to be discussed in the subsequent stages of the peace process.

We urge the General Assembly to play its role and to use its influence to bring an end to the continuation of Israeli expansionism and settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem. We appeal to this body to consider all these Israeli policies and practices as violations of all relevant United Nations resolutions, of international agreements, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and of international law, and pronounce itself accordingly.

Through you, Mr. President, we would like also to request the international community to persuade Israel to lift the siege around Jerusalem and to stop the implementation of all decisions and practices that adversely affect the interests of the Palestinian people, especially the confiscation of Palestinian lands, the demolishing of Palestinian properties and houses, and the withdrawal of identity cards issued to Palestinians, designed to expel them from Jerusalem. We also request the international community to prevent Israeli excavations around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and to make Israel cease forthwith the violations of the Islamic and Christian holy places in Jerusalem.

In conclusion, I should like to reassure the General Assembly, through you, Mr. President — as I have done in the Security Council — that as soon as the necessary measures to restore peace and security in the area have been undertaken, improving the environment for the resumption of the peace process, the OIC and its 54 member States, representing the very serious concerns of more than 1 billion Muslims all over the world, will also reaffirm their wholehearted support for the peace process, in fulfilment of their collective desire to see peace and tranquillity return to the area.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I should like to inform members of the Assembly that with regard to agenda items 33 and 35 a draft resolution will be published in provisional form in document A/51/L.68. Delegations may obtain copies of this document at the documents distribution window at 5.15 p.m. today.

The General Assembly will take action on draft resolution A/51/L.68 tomorrow afternoon at 3 p.m.

Organization of work

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): In connection with agenda item 21 (b), "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions", I have requested His Excellency Mr. Ernst Sucharipa of Austria, who has ably coordinated the informal consultations during this session on draft resolutions submitted under agenda item 21, to coordinate the consultations on a draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly on assistance to Tajikistan.

I should like to inform members that the informal consultations on the draft resolution will be announced in the *Journal*.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.